



Support for veterans and their families has always been a national concern. In 1626, the Plymouth Colony passed a law that provided lifetime support for any soldier who returned from battle with an injury. In 1789, the Continental Congress passed a national pension law for soldiers who fought in the American Revolution. President Lincoln signed legislation in 1862 which authorized national cemeteries. In 1865, the National Home for Volunteer Soldiers was established, and homes for disabled Civil War veterans were opened in several locations throughout the country.

In 1919, the United States Government Life Insurance program was established. In 1930, a major consolidation of veterans service functions occurred when President Hoover signed a bill which established the Veterans Administration, an independent Federal agency that incorporated the Veterans Bureau, Bureau of Pensions, and National Home for Volunteer Soldiers.

During World War II, the Nation's most far-reaching program for veterans was established with the passage of the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, also known as "The GI Bill of Rights," which offered low interest loans to purchase homes, farms, or small businesses; unemployment benefits; financial assistance for education; and health care and rehabilitation services. Ultimately, in 1988, recognizing the need to coordinate the full range of services for our Nation's veterans, Congress established a new cabinet post creating the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

VA will continue to transform. Today, there are nearly 25 million men and women who have served in the armed forces. VA currently provides health care and benefit services to millions of veterans as well as eligible survivors and dependents of veterans. The needs of today's veterans and their families will continue to change. While the future veteran population will most likely be smaller, veterans will live longer and may require additional health care and benefit services. As a Department, our vision for the future is:

As the Department of Veterans Affairs heads into the 21st Century, we will strive to meet the needs of the Nation's veterans and their families today and tomorrow. We will become an even more veteran-focused organization, functioning as a single comprehensive provider of seamless service to the men and women who have served our Nation. We will continuously benchmark the quality and delivery of our service with the best in business and use innovative means and high technology to deliver world-class service. We will foster partnerships with veterans and other stakeholders, making them part of the decision-making process. We will cultivate a dedicated VA work force of highly skilled employees who understand, believe in, and take pride in our vitally important mission.

This document, our second Annual Statement, communicates VA's mission, core values, long-term goals, and our commitment to serving veterans and their families. It also provides a top level summary of key accomplishments of the past year and the major accomplishments that VA plans to achieve within the next 12 to 15 months. For more detailed information regarding VA's long-term strategic direction, FY 1999 accomplishments and planned achievements for FY 2001, I encourage you to refer to VA's compendium of planning documents, including the Strategic Plan for FY 2001 - 2006, FY 1999 Annual Performance Report, and FY 2001 Annual Performance Plan.

Since joining VA, I have worked with my leadership team to address the changing needs of veterans, and I am proud of the Department's accomplishments which have directly benefited veterans. We are an effective organization today; however, I want to stress to our stakeholders, the American taxpayer, VA employees, and most important, our Nation's veterans, that the Department of Veterans Affairs will continue to strive for excellence in all areas by operating as *One VA* to deliver world-class, seamless service to veterans and their families.

Hershel W. Gober
Acting Secretary
Department of Veterans Affairs